

The Book of Genesis, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 7: God's Covenant with Noah

Genesis 8:1–9:29

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This passage moves from the receding of the flood to God's covenant with Noah and finally to Noah's tragic failure, and it is rich with doctrine. It reveals God's faithfulness (He 'remembered' Noah), the priority and fittingness of worship, God's patient preservation of the natural order (often called common grace), the nature of covenant as God relating to His creation by binding promise, the sacredness of human life grounded in the image of God, and, in Noah's drunkenness, the sobering truth that even the best human beings are sinners in need of a greater Savior.

Two areas call for special care. First, the sanctity of life passage (9:5–6) grounds the value of every human being, and human accountability for the taking of life, in the image of God; teach it as the dignity of all people, and let it inform a high view of human life from the womb onward. Second, the curse on Canaan (9:25) has been wickedly misused in history to justify the enslavement and oppression of certain peoples, especially on the basis of race. Address this head-on: the curse falls on Canaan and was fulfilled in the subjugation of the Canaanite peoples; it has nothing whatever to do with skin color or race, and Scripture insists that God made of one all the nations of mankind (Acts 17:26). Repudiate the racist misreading plainly.

Formationally, the passage invites students to trust God's faithfulness in seasons of waiting, to make worship and gratitude their reflex after deliverance, to honor the sacredness of human life, and to face honestly the truth that no mere human, not even Noah, can be our savior. Lead them, finally, to the better covenant and the greater Deliverer, Jesus Christ, toward whom the whole passage leans.

Question 1

Student Question:

Genesis 8:1 says, "But God remembered Noah." In Scripture, for God to "remember" means to act on behalf of His people according to His promise. What does this reveal about God's faithfulness and His care for those who trust Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

"But God remembered Noah" (8:1) is not a statement that God had momentarily forgotten him. In Scripture, for God to 'remember' is a covenant word; it means He turns to act on behalf of His people in keeping with His promise. The same language is used when God 'remembered' His covenant and acted to deliver Israel from Egypt (Exodus 2:24).

So this is a verse about God's faithful, attentive care. Through the long months on the water, it might have seemed to Noah that God had gone silent. Then, at the appointed time, God acts. He sends a wind over the waters (echoing the Spirit hovering in Genesis 1) and begins to bring the world, and His people, back to dry land and life.

Help students hear the comfort in this for their own waiting. There are seasons when God seems silent and we feel forgotten. This verse promises that God's people are never actually out of His mind or off His timetable. He remembers, and He acts, even when we cannot yet see it.

Tie it to God's character. God remembers because God is faithful. His care is not fickle or forgetful. The same God who remembered Noah remembers every one of His own, and will act for them at the right time.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God 'remembering' as covenant faithfulness in action (Exodus 2:24).
- God's attentive care for His people even through seasons of apparent silence.
- The believer never being forgotten or off God's timetable.
- God's faithfulness grounded in His unchanging character.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean in Scripture for God to 'remember' someone?
- How is this verse a comfort to those who feel forgotten by God?
- How does God's faithfulness to Noah encourage you in your own waiting?

Question 2

Student Question:

Noah and his family waited in the ark for many long months before God brought them out. Where are you in a season of waiting on God right now? How do you keep trusting Him when His timing is slower than you would like?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question applies Noah's long wait to the student's life. Noah was in the ark for over a year, much of it after the rain had stopped, simply waiting for God to bring him out. Waiting is one of the hardest disciplines of faith, and one of the most common.

Help students see that waiting is not wasted time in God's economy. The Bible is full of those who waited: Abraham for a son, Joseph in prison, David for the throne, all of God's people for the Messiah. Waiting is often where faith is deepened and character is formed.

Encourage honesty about the difficulty. Waiting tempts us to take matters into our own hands, to grow bitter, or to assume God has forgotten. Noah did none of these; he waited on God's timing, even sending out birds to discern it, and acted when God said to come out.

Point students to the posture that sustains waiting: trust in the character and timing of God. We can wait well when we are convinced that the One we wait for is faithful and that His timing is better than ours. Invite each student to name a current waiting and a way to wait in trust rather than anxiety.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Waiting as a normal and formative part of the life of faith.
- The temptation to seize control, grow bitter, or assume God has forgotten.
- Trusting God's character and timing while we wait.
- Discerning and submitting to God's timing rather than our own.

Discussion Prompts

- What are you waiting on God for right now?
- What does waiting tempt you toward, and how can you resist it?
- How does trusting God's character help you wait well?

Question 3

Student Question:

As soon as he was delivered, Noah built an altar and worshiped, and God responded with the promise of 8:21–22, that seedtime and harvest and the seasons would not cease. What does this teach us about worship as our response to God, and about God's patient preservation of the world?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Noah's first act on dry land is worship. He builds an altar and offers sacrifices, giving back to God from the very animals he had so carefully preserved. Before he plants a field or builds a house, he gives thanks. Worship is his reflex, not his afterthought.

God's response is striking and gracious. He 'smells the pleasing aroma' and resolves in His heart never again to curse the ground or destroy every living creature as He had done. Then comes the promise of 8:22: as long as the earth remains, the rhythms of seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will not cease.

This is what theologians call common grace, God's patient, generous upholding of the natural order for all people, the righteous and the unrighteous alike. Every dependable sunrise, every changing season, every harvest is God keeping this promise. Jesus said the Father makes His sun rise on the evil and the good (Matthew 5:45).

Draw out both halves for the class. Worship is the fitting first response to deliverance, and God meets that worship with a promise that steadies the whole world. Our gratitude rises, and God's faithfulness comes down to sustain the very ground under our feet.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worship as the fitting first response to God's deliverance.
- God's gracious promise to preserve the natural order (Genesis 8:22).
- Common grace: God's patient provision for all people (Matthew 5:45).
- Gratitude meeting divine faithfulness.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it significant that Noah worshiped before doing anything else?
- How is God keeping the promise of 8:22 in your life every day?
- What does common grace teach us about God's generosity?

Question 4

Student Question:

When God blesses you or brings you through a trial, is gratitude and worship your first instinct, or an afterthought? What helps you respond to God's deliverance with genuine thanksgiving rather than quickly moving on?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns Noah's worship into a personal mirror. When God delivers us, from an illness, a crisis, a hard season, what is our first response? Too often it is relief and a quick return to normal life, with gratitude an afterthought, if it comes at all.

Help students notice the human tendency to cry out to God in trouble and forget Him in deliverance. The nine lepers who did not return to thank Jesus are a sobering picture (Luke 17:11–19). Ingratitude is not a small fault; Romans 1 traces humanity's downward slide partly to failing to honor God or give thanks (Romans 1:21).

Offer practical helps toward worship as a reflex. Naming God's mercies specifically, building gratitude into prayer, and marking deliverances with deliberate thanksgiving (as Noah marked his with an altar) all train the heart to respond rightly. Gratitude is a discipline that becomes a disposition.

Invite a concrete step: a recent deliverance or blessing the student has not properly thanked God for, and a way to do so this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The tendency to cry out in trouble but forget God in deliverance (Luke 17:11–19).
- Ingratitude as a serious spiritual failure (Romans 1:21).
- Cultivating gratitude as a discipline that shapes the heart.
- Marking God's deliverances with deliberate thanksgiving.

Discussion Prompts

- Is worship your reflex after deliverance, or an afterthought?
- What recent mercy have you not properly thanked God for?
- What practice could help make gratitude more natural for you?

Question 5

Student Question:

God makes a covenant with Noah and every living creature, promising never again to destroy the earth by flood, and gives the rainbow as its sign (9:8–17). What is a covenant, and what does this reveal about how God chooses to relate to His creation, by binding promise?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Genesis 9 introduces one of the Bible's great themes: covenant. A covenant is a solemn, binding commitment that defines a relationship. Here God commits Himself, unilaterally and graciously, never again to destroy the earth by flood, and He makes this covenant not only with Noah but with every living creature and all future generations.

This tells us something profound about how God chooses to relate to His creation: by promise. God does not leave us guessing about His intentions; He binds Himself by His word. The whole Bible can be read as a story of God's covenants, advancing toward the new covenant in Christ (Hebrews 8). To know God is to know a God who keeps His promises.

The rainbow is the sign of this covenant, a visible pledge attached to the promise. Whenever the rain falls and the bow appears, it preaches that God remembers and keeps His word. Signs like this are gifts to our weak faith, tangible reminders of intangible promises.

Help students grasp the security this offers. God's covenant rests on His faithfulness, not on our performance. The promise to Noah holds firm regardless of how good or bad the world becomes. A God who relates by covenant is a God we can count on.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Covenant as God's binding, gracious commitment defining a relationship.
- God relating to His creation by promise, not leaving us guessing.
- The rainbow as a covenant sign, a tangible pledge to weak faith.
- The trajectory of God's covenants toward the new covenant in Christ (Hebrews 8).

Discussion Prompts

- What is a covenant, and why does it matter that God relates to us by covenant?
- What is the purpose of a covenant sign like the rainbow?
- How does God's faithfulness to His covenants give you security?

Question 6

Student Question:

God's promises do not depend on our circumstances or feelings, but on His character. What promise of God do you most need to lean your weight on this week, and how would resting in it change the way you face your situation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites students to lean their weight on a specific promise of God. The covenant with Noah is a window onto the larger truth that God's promises rest on His character, not on our circumstances or feelings.

Help students move from believing in promises generally to resting on a particular one. Scripture is full of promises suited to our situations: God's presence (Hebrews 13:5), His provision (Philippians 4:19), His working all things for good (Romans 8:28), His forgiveness (1 John 1:9), His return (John 14:3). Faith takes a specific promise and stands on it.

Address the gap between knowing a promise and resting in it. We often know the promise in our heads while anxiety rules our hearts. Resting in a promise means returning to it deliberately, preaching it to ourselves, and letting it reframe how we see our circumstances.

Invite each student to name the one promise they most need this week and one way they will lean on it, perhaps by writing it down, praying it back to God, or recalling it at the moment of worry.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's promises grounded in His character, not our circumstances.
- Moving from general belief to resting on a specific promise.
- The gap between knowing a promise and trusting it in the heart.
- Preaching God's promises to ourselves in anxiety.

Discussion Prompts

- Which promise of God do you most need to lean on this week?
- What is the difference between knowing a promise and resting in it?
- How could you preach that promise to yourself when worry comes?

Question 7

Student Question:

In the covenant, God declares the sacredness of human life: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image” (9:6). Why is human life so valuable in God’s eyes, and what responsibilities does this place on us and on human society?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In the Noahic covenant God establishes a foundational principle of justice: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image” (9:6). The reason human life is so sacred is given explicitly: human beings bear the image of God. To attack a human life is to attack the One whose image it carries.

This grounds the sanctity of human life on the firmest possible foundation, not on usefulness, ability, or social value, but on the image of God stamped on every person. It is the basis for honoring life from the womb to the grave, for the strong and the weak, the wanted and the unwanted alike.

Note also that God here establishes human accountability for the taking of life. This is the seed of the principle that human societies are responsible to restrain and punish evil, a principle Paul develops when he says governing authorities bear the sword as God’s servants for justice (Romans 13:1–4). God cares about justice in human community.

Help students see the breadth of the application. A high view of the image of God shapes how we think about the unborn, the elderly, the disabled, the criminal, the enemy, and the stranger. Every one of them bears God’s image, and that truth should govern how we speak of them and treat them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The sacredness of human life grounded in the image of God (Genesis 9:6).
- Human dignity based on God’s image, not usefulness or social value.
- Human accountability and the responsibility of society to restrain evil (Romans 13:1–4).
- A high view of life from the womb to the grave, including the weak and the enemy.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God ground the value of human life in His own image?
- What responsibilities does the sacredness of life place on individuals and society?
- How broadly should the image of God shape how we view people?

Question 8

Student Question:

How does the truth that every person is made in God's image shape the way you actually treat people, including those who are different from you, weaker than you, or opposed to you? Where do you need to grow in honoring the dignity of human life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the image of God into everyday relationships. It is easy to affirm the sanctity of life in principle and quietly violate it in practice, through contempt, prejudice, cruelty, or indifference toward people we consider beneath us or against us.

Help students examine where they functionally deny others' dignity: in how they speak about people of other backgrounds, in how they treat those who can do nothing for them, in how they regard opponents and enemies. The image of God in a person does not depend on whether we like or agree with them.

Highlight the breadth of 'every person.' This includes those different from us in race, culture, status, or belief. Scripture is emphatic that God made every nation from one man (Acts 17:26); there is one human family, all bearing His image. Honoring that truth is a frontline matter of Christian love.

Invite a concrete commitment: one relationship or group of people the student has failed to honor as image-bearers, and one way to begin treating them differently this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honoring the image of God in practice, not only in principle.
- Rejecting contempt, prejudice, and cruelty toward any person.
- The unity of the human family, all made by God (Acts 17:26).
- Love and honor extended even to the different, the weak, and the opposed.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you most fail to honor the image of God in others?
- How does the truth of one human family confront prejudice?
- What is one way you can better honor human dignity this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

The chapter ends with Noah, the most righteous man of his age, becoming drunk and shamefully exposed, followed by the curse on Canaan (9:18–27). What does Noah's fall teach us about every human being's need for a greater Savior? And how should we understand the curse on Canaan, especially against those who have wrongly twisted it to justify racism?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest part of the lesson, and it requires both honesty and care. First, Noah's fall. The most righteous man of his generation, the hero of the flood, the new beginning for the human race, plants a vineyard, becomes drunk, and lies shamefully exposed. The flood washed the world, but it did not wash the human heart. Even Noah is a sinner.

Draw out the doctrinal point clearly. The hope of the world was never going to be a good enough man. If even Noah falls, then no mere human being can be our savior. The new world still groans for a greater Deliverer, one who would not fail. This drives us toward Christ, the truly righteous one, the second Adam who did not sin. Noah's failure is a signpost pointing past himself.

Then address the curse on Canaan, because this text has been gravely abused. After Ham dishonors his father, Noah pronounces a curse, and it falls specifically on Canaan, Ham's son: 'a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers' (9:25). This was fulfilled in history when the Canaanite peoples, descended from Canaan, were subjugated by Israel and others. The curse is about Canaan and his descendants, a particular people, not about race or skin color at all.

Confront the misuse head-on, because students may have heard it. For centuries some tried to use this passage to justify the enslavement and oppression of African peoples, calling it 'the curse of Ham.' This is a wicked and false reading. The text says nothing about skin color; it names Canaan, not all of Ham's descendants; and Scripture flatly contradicts any racial hierarchy by declaring that God 'made from one man every nation of mankind' (Acts 17:26) and that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek (Galatians 3:28). The gospel tears down every wall of racial division (Ephesians 2:14). We should name the abuse of this text for the sin it is and reject it without hesitation.

Close on a note of hope and humility. The chapter ends with even a delivered world marred by sin and family dishonor. We are not better than Noah. We need the same grace, and we need the greater Deliverer. The covenant with Noah, good as it is, only preserves the world; it cannot cleanse the heart. For that, God will make a new covenant in Christ (Hebrews 8:6-13), and that is where the story is heading.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Even the most righteous human (Noah) is a sinner, showing the need for a greater Savior.
- No mere human can be our savior; the hope points beyond Noah to Christ, the sinless second Adam.
- The curse falling specifically on Canaan and fulfilled in the Canaanite peoples, not about race or skin color.
- Repudiating the historical, racist misuse of this text to justify slavery and oppression.
- Scripture's affirmation of one human family and the abolition of racial division in Christ (Acts 17:26; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:14).
- The Noahic covenant preserving the world but not cleansing the heart, pointing to the new covenant (Hebrews 8).

Discussion Prompts

- What does Noah's fall teach us about the need for a Savior greater than any man?
- Who does the curse actually fall on, and how was it fulfilled in history?
- How does Scripture itself refute every attempt to use this text to justify racism?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over the whole passage, from God remembering Noah to the rainbow in the sky to Noah's failure. Name one specific way God is calling you to trust His faithfulness, to worship Him, and to long for the greater Deliverer the passage points toward.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this capstone to gather the passage's threads into one resolve. We have seen a God who remembers His people, who keeps covenant, who preserves the world, who values every human life, and whose best human servant still fails. The student is invited to trust that faithful God, to worship Him, to honor His image in others, and to long for the greater Deliverer.

Press for the specific. For one student the lesson is about trusting God's faithfulness in a season of waiting; for another, making worship a reflex; for another, honoring the dignity of someone they have despised; for another, facing honestly their own Noah-like failures and running to grace.

Close by lifting their eyes to Christ and the new covenant. The rainbow promised that God would not destroy the world; the cross promises something greater, that God will redeem it, and cleanse the very hearts the flood could not wash. Isaiah even compares God's steadfast covenant love to the promise made in the days of Noah (Isaiah 54:9-10). To be formed by this passage is to rest in that faithful, covenant-keeping God and to set our hope on the Deliverer who never fails.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Trusting God's covenant faithfulness in seasons of waiting and uncertainty.
- Worship and honoring the image of God as ongoing responses.
- Facing our own failures honestly and running to grace.
- The new covenant in Christ as the fulfillment of God's promise-keeping love (Isaiah 54:9-10; Hebrews 8).

Discussion Prompts

- Which of God's qualities in this passage do you most need to trust right now?
- Where is God calling you to worship or to honor His image in someone?
- How does the new covenant in Christ surpass the covenant with Noah?